

# 40 ORCHARDS

Dear 40 Orchards Community,

What a year all of us have walked through! As an organization committed to community voices and participation, we wanted to share with you how the mission of 40 Orchards unfolded during this challenging year.

Like everyone, we struggled. Some of our community stopped attending, we had to cancel some programs, and we weren't sure how to move forward. We can look back and see some ways that we failed. Yet we can also see more clearly now the work that is ours to do, and want to celebrate with you the good that has come.

We are humbled that in the midst of a global pandemic, many of our circles became a safe space for people to land. We pivoted quickly to a virtual format while remaining true to our values. With so much grief and change to process, our circles became places of refuge, hope, and community.

This report contains a snapshot of a few things that have been happening at 40 Orchards, and how we've felt God with us. None of this could have happened without the support, participation, and spirit of the 40 Orchards community. We are so grateful for you.

In hope for all that lies ahead,  
Steph, Lisa, and the 40 Orchards Board

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## 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

*"I don't know how I would have come out from this year without the Cohort. Yes, it was difficult not meeting in person but the constancy of having something to hope for helped me walk through some really dark days."*

*- Kristina (Cohort Dalet)*

# Some things that have been happening...



## WE EXPANDED OUR REACH.

Virtual circles took our community beyond Minnesota. We now have participants from California, Nevada, Colorado, Michigan, and even Germany!



## WE CONNECTED TO RHYTHMS.

In a time when days blurred, we helped people engage thoughtfully with the seasonal rhythms, adding Advent and Lenten Scripture Circles, and moving our Seder Experience to a virtual event. Many new people connected through these experiences.



## WE DEEPENED OUR ROOTS.

In fall of 2020, we launched a new Roots program, growing our offerings to three: Torah, Gospels, and Prophets. Prophets was so popular that we offered and filled a second session in spring of 2021.



## WE ENGAGED IN RACIAL JUSTICE.

We responded to the murder of George Floyd and the rising calls for racial justice first by opening studies on justice in summer 2020, and then by launching a new Perspectives program in October. Through Perspectives we have centered and learned from traditionally marginalized BIPOC voices. These sessions have been rich, both for our community and new attendees.



## WE CONTINUED THE COHORT.

Cohort Dalet had a closing retreat day in July 2020 that was a deeply moving experience of God's presence and community. In January 2021, Cohort Hey began. Even though in the midst of the pandemic, we are going strong with 10 members.



## WE STAYED IN THE BLACK.

In a time when many organizations struggled, we continued to have people attend our programs, our generous donors continued to support us, and we never missed a payroll.



## WE LED COMMUNALLY.

Our commitment to the communal voice is both about what we do and how we do it. We don't believe leadership needs to take the form of a solo and lonely guru. In that spirit, Stephanie and Lisa moved into a co-leadership model, and we added Sarah Nichols as a new teacher. We look forward to adding more teachers and board members in the future.



## WE MOURNED THE LOSS OF HUGS.

Though the pivot to virtual circles went well, it is not the same as in-person. We are proud of how we worked to honor CDC guidelines and protect the vulnerable among us. But we grieved with you the loss of connection. Some have struggled to participate, or have even dropped out, during this time of virtual gatherings.



## WE WRESTLED WITH HARD THINGS.

We struggled to fill some studies and programs, and had to cancel a few, not knowing whether topic, timing, or fatigue was the cause. We were frustrated by the continued lack of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in our circles. We still hope to teach in the prisons, and continue in the slow way forward. We know wrestling like this is an essential part of leadership and the human journey.

## Some numbers that stand out to us...

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### STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

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The pandemic led to the loss of a few partnerships, but we continued to teach with Awaken Community, Bethel University, and Colonial Church. We hope to add more partners in the future.

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### NEW PERSPECTIVES GATHERINGS

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We learned from Joe Davis, Jia Starr Brown, Kelly Sherman-Conroy, and Kiah Glenn. Each listening session brought 15-30 people, honoring our culture of intimacy while also expanding bigger than our circles. Several new people came, and many attended multiple sessions.

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### ROOTS PROGRAMS

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Each year, we have expanded our Roots program. We offered Torah in both a 10-month, and new this summer, weekly, format. We offered Prophets in a twice-a-month followed by 10-month format. We also offered Gospels monthly. All told, about 50 people joined Roots, about 25% new to the program.

84

### SCRIPTURE CIRCLES

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Putting together partnerships, Roots, Perspectives, one-time, and seasonal offerings (but not including the Cohort), we held about 84 Scripture Circles this year! Those circles include many who have gone through some kind of faith deconstruction and are feeling lost. We provide a safe space for their questions and exploration of a more expansive way to hold Scripture.

14

### PEOPLE PER CIRCLE

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We cap every Scripture Circle to an attendance of 14. This is an expression of our values of seeing each other and wrestling together. We want every voice to be heard. This summer, we opened bonus circles for Potentially Dangerous Questions, in order to accommodate the many who wanted to attend.

28

### HOUSEHOLDS SERVED

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Our Seder experience virtually joined 28 households together to eat symbolic food, look for God, and ask each other questions about what it means to leave the Narrow Place. This brought a mix of people who were new to, returning to, and rediscovering 40 Orchards.

## Some things that are coming next...

### More Dangerous Questions

The popularity of our Potentially Dangerous Questions series shows us it's something you want us to continue. What questions do you have? Send us your suggestions!

### More Perspectives Speakers

We look forward to learning from more BIPOC leaders about their faith experiences. Do you have a leader in mind that we should hear from? Please let us know!

### A New Roots- on Women!

This fall we are adding a new Daughters of the Torah Roots. We can't wait for you to join us, especially in this new set of studies focusing on the women in the Bible!

### Cohort Vav (Did you know we name each group after a Hebrew letter?)

We will also begin accepting applications to our Cohort program in November. Do you want to know more? Do you know someone who would be a good fit? Let's connect!

### A New Podcast: Searching the Sacred

Watch for our new Podcast, Searching the Sacred, a partnership between 40 Orchards and Processing Faith, to hit the airwaves before the end of 2021.

# A reminder of the mission, vision, and values that guide everything we do... Thank you for being part of it.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to create safe spaces for the curious, the doubters, and the hope seekers to wrestle through biblical texts using the ancient Jewish concepts of midrash so that - together - we can expand each other's experience of what is sacred, whole, and good.

## Our Vision

Our vision is for all people to experience wholeness, hope, and freedom.

## Our Values

We are committed to bringing our core values into every Scripture Circle—and weaving them into everything we do. We are committed to:

### Seeing each other.

We believe humans are designed to be in relationship with God and with one another, and we want every person to experience what it means to see and be seen, to love and be loved.

### Creating space.

In a 40 Orchards study, what is learned is not driven by outlines and agendas. We spend time listening, we get comfortable with silence, ask questions, and make room for every voice in the room, including God's.

### Cultivating life.

We believe each person has unique gifts they're meant to bring to the world—gifts that rest within them like seeds waiting to burst forth.

### Rooting deeply.

We believe there are threads connecting passages into the larger story of God and humanity—and that language and history can help us unlock layers of meaning, beyond the surface level.

### Wrestling together.

We are committed to creating spaces that are safe for each of us to come as we are, with all our doubts and fears. We teach not through lecture, but in dialogue.

### Expecting more.

We believe it's not incidental that the original dwelling place on earth—where humans and God walked side by side—was named Eden, or "delight". We look to the future through the lens of sacred possibility.

**Will you help us achieve our mission, promote our values, and expand our programming in the coming year? Donate at <https://40orchards.org/donate>**

*"I haven't experienced anything like these Scripture circles and am so profoundly grateful for the safe, communal space you've created."*

*-Taylor (Lenten Circles)*